



11th March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Re: COVID-19

I am writing to you to further update you with our planning, preparation and precautions we are taking in the light of the extended COVID-19 outbreak across the world.

Chief Operating Officer Simon Campbell and I continue to discuss our precautions and response every day, taking into account the daily briefings from the Department for Education and the response of other schools and School Trusts.

The government continues to designate the country to be in the 'contain' phase of responding to the virus. This means that schools are expected to remain open, and we are expected to promote hand-washing and diligence. The most important thing that we can each do is to wash our hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds. We are appreciative that parents have reinforced this message at home and I thank you for your support in ensuring that children do this regularly.

Please can you familiarise yourself with the symptoms of coronavirus on the NHS website here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

The government have also indicated the likely response if and when we move to a 'delay' phase regarding the virus. This could include measures summarised as 'social distancing' and it is indicated that it is possible this could include school closures.

I know some pupils and families are nervous about the health implications for themselves and for relatives. Be assured we monitor the situation daily, I am in contact with the Principals of our schools, Ms Baxter and Mr Blake, and all decisions are taken in the best interests of students.

You will be aware that we are very reluctant to close our schools for any reason. However, if the government advise schools to close, we will follow that advice. We understand this will cause significant strain on families, but we feel in the circumstances we must follow the safety advice of health officials.

I know that we are also all nervous about the educational implications of a proposed closure. Should we be required to or make a decision to close, in line with our values we

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will attempt to provide work to mitigate any negative effect. We do not know for sure our capacity to do so currently, but we are preparing resources and ensuring that as many staff as possible have access to emails and appropriate communication methods (such as Show My Homework, Tapestry or Class Dojo) from home as well as school.

We will use the school website and facebook page for broader communication.

It is hence likely that pupils will be in a stronger position to access things that are sent home, or feedback from teachers, if they have access to a suitable device and the internet.

If you currently have a situation where your child is unable to access the internet or doesn't have access to a suitable device such as a laptop, tablet or even a 'smart' mobile phone, please can you telephone the school office on 01234 332290 or email the office on info@bedfordfreeschool.co.uk. This allows us to be prepared to send alternatives home if possible and if absolutely necessary. In addition, if several children are in the same home and there are insufficient devices for them to access feedback or work simultaneously, please can you advise us in the same way. Please inform us of this immediately – we are more likely to be able to prepare if we know in advance.

Please ensure the school has your up to date address, email address and contact telephone numbers.

We understand that because of national public examinations, families and pupils in years 11 and 6 are likely to be the most worried about the implications of a closure, should we have to. We will prioritise those year groups should we have to close.

On the prospect of disruption to SATs and GCSEs, OFQUAL have put out advice that says that at the current time we should continue to prepare pupils as normal, but that they will plan for a range of scenarios. Please see here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/updated-statement-on-coronavirus>

The Department for Education have also launched a helpline for schools and parents.
Telephone: 0800 046 8687

Lines are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm.

While there are some things we cannot know, we are putting ourselves in the strongest possible position to ensure we can make decisions that are in the best interests of our pupils in a timely manner as the situation develops.

Should you have any queries, please contact your child's school on info@bedfordfreeschool.co.uk

In the meantime, I'd like to remind us to ensure the highest standards of hygiene and take appropriate precautions, including the proper washing of hands with soap and warm water.

Very best wishes,



Stuart Lock
CEO
Advantage Schools

Further Action Taken:

We have consulted with our IT provider to increase the access our colleagues have to specialist IT support.

- We have ensured that colleagues can access IT remotely from any location
- We have ensured that our cleaning contractors have capacity for a deep clean at Bedford Free School or at Elstow School if necessary
- We have extremely regular checks to ensure that there is sufficient soap at all times for handwashing

